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Trends. The Case for Reflexively Condemning Reflexively Condemning Human Rights Violations

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The Executive Director of Amnesty International (AI) supports the condemnation of human rights violations wherever they occur. He has stated that--through such reflexive condemnation--AI "never compares or ranks the human rights of countries." However, in so far as the consequences of one's acts label these acts, AI necessarily induces comparison and ranking processes among the recipients of its information.

One set of processes equates all human rights violations. If AI describes all violations with no comments on such violations' comparative nature, an implicit equation of all violations is nurtured--e.g., between the use of the death penalty for a convicted serial rapist-cannibal-murderer and the torture and murder of political dissidents advocating the freedom to practice a formal religion. As well, AI's non-comparative stance on human rights violations discounts the spontaneous social comparison processes that are characteristic of social cognition. That is, social comparison processes that may equate or differentiate human rights violations will occur in any case.

Why not take the plunge and produce text containing exacting comparisons of human rights violations within, between, and among perpetrators? Caveats of literary theory and criticism concerning subjectivism, political bias, cultural relativism, deconstructionism, privileging, subjugation, discipline, and the like pale before the reality that not comparing human violations may be a human rights violation in itself. (See Akman, V. (2000). Rethinking context as a social construct. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32, 743-759; Blanton, H., George, G., & Crocker, J. (2001). Contexts of system justification and system evaluation: Exploring the social comparison strategies of the (not yet) contented female worker. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 4, 126-137; Kemmelmeier, M., & Oyserman, D. (2001). Gendered influence of downward social comparisons on current and possible selves. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57, 129-148; Schulz, W.F. (June 5, 2001). Human rights records. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Weary, G., & Reich, D. A. (2001). Attributional effects of conflicting chronic and temporary outcome expectancies: A case of automatic comparison and contrast. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 562-574.) (Keywords: Amnesty International, Human Rights.)